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Allegiances

KITTYPETS

Sappy - Dark golden brown she-cat with dark brown muzzle, throat, nose blaze, black chin, ears, paws, and tail tip, amber eyes.

Scritch - Black tom with three white stripes on his sides, pale yellow eyes.

WHISKEY'S GANG

Leader: Whiskey - Older gray-brown tom with copper eyes.

Jericho - Dark gray tabby and white tom with dark blue eyes.

Bandit - Black tom with a white muzzle and paws, green eyes.

Roxy - Red and brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Shingles - Old brown tabby tom with ragged fur and dull yellow eyes.

Diesel - Black and brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Marshall - Black and brown tom with hazel eyes.

Drizzle - Gray spotted she-cat with pale green eyes.

DRACO'S GANG

Leader: Draco - Maroon tabby tom with amber eyes. Wears a black collar.

Boone - Dark gray tabby tom with green eyes. Wears a brown collar.

Blade - Thin silver tom with yellow eyes. Wears a red collar.

Hook - Black and dark brown tom with dark green eyes, one long tooth.

Widow - Slender oriental black she-cat with amber eyes.

Puddle - Pale gray tom with brown splashes, light teal eyes.

Barrel - Big brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Ace - Black and white tom with green eyes. Wears a black collar.

Slang - Gray tabby tom with amber eyes.

Clay - Light gray-brown tom with lighter paws and pale green eyes.

Bombshell - Red tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes.

Bell - Creamy yellow tabby she-cat with yellow eyes. Wears a pink collar with a bell.

Prologue

A cold breeze blew against the pine trees, their thinnest branches swaying gently in the night. The forest seemed eerily quiet, for most cats were asleep in camp. But not every cat. Two shadows moved quietly through the trees.

Poisonedsap padded onward, feeling the damp pine needles beneath her pads. Moons ago when she'd first joined ShadowClan, this territory had felt unbearable. For days she had cringed in disgust at the mud oozing between her toes, the stray pine needles that stuck in her fur. But she had adapted. There was no other choice, or the plan would fail.

She glanced aside. A cream tabby tom walked beside her, though there was a space between them, as if some invisible cat was accompanying them. This tom was the cat she called her mate. The father of her kits. But there were no feelings of affection between them. Only tension, cold and sharp as ice shards.

Then why was she alone with him tonight? She knew exactly why. *But Maplefur doesn't. This foolish tom has let me lead him out into the forest alone*. She unsheathed her claws halfway. *He has no idea that he's going to die tonight.* They had just passed a patch of bushes. Deciding that they were far enough from the camp, she stopped.

Maplefur paused and turned to face her, his yellow eyes dull in the darkness. For a long moment, they stared at each other calmly, a silent challenge flashing in both their eyes as one waited for the other to speak.

Moons ago, Poisonedsap had begun the difficult task of training her two sons, Stonekit and Swiftkit, preparing them for the eventual battle that she and Deserve's Army would launch against the clans. The clans only trained cats to fight when they reached six moons. And Poisonedsap had seen very quickly how pathetic this training

was. Mentors didn't even allow their apprentices to practice with unsheathed claws! This would not do for her kits. They needed to be strong and merciless fighters. She needed to teach them this before a mentor filled their brains with fluff.

Maplefur had become aware of her training and disapproved. He had become a bigger nuisance than ever, arguing with her about showing the kits battle moves, having that stupid horrified look on his face whenever one of the kits received a scratch. The mouse-hearted tom was too soft on the kits. He was weakening them, especially Swiftkit. Poisonedsap knew that she could not allow him to be a part of their lives anymore.

Tonight, she had caught Maplefur in the nursery visiting Swiftkit when she had ordered him to stay away. Clearly he was not going to listen to her warning. So she had quickly come up with a lie, an invitation to talk alone in the forest about their kits. And he had fallen for it.

"Well?" Maplefur watched her, a faint hope in his eyes.

She had to hold back an amused grin at his foolishness. *He really believes I'm going to let him stay in the kits' lives.* She took a step toward him. "This is your last chance, Maplefur." She growled. "Stay away from those kits."

Genuine surprise flashed in his eyes. "What? You said-"

"I say a lot of things." Poisonedsap replied. *And you always fall for it.*

Maplefur's eyes blazed with anger. "How dare you do this?" He hissed. "After all I've done for you? You were a rogue, and not just any rogue. You were a member of your brother's gang. Those cats tormented the clans! They attacked warriors and apprentices, even killed some!"

The days of power. Poisonedsap remembered it fondly. Her brother had been a strong, powerful cat named Bone Shred. A RiverClan cat called Iceslide, who perhaps was even more foolish than Maplefur, had led their gang to the forest. They had launched war on the clans with the intent to take over their territories. Poisonedsap

wistfully recalled how powerful she felt. The feeling of her claws ripping flesh, warm blood gushing onto her tongue, the dying scream of a warrior.

"Your brother was killed," Maplefur went on, and the words sent hot anger through Poisonedsap. She dug her claws into the damp ground. "And you begged for mercy. You begged us to give you food and shelter. You seemed like a helpless, innocent she-cat. You told us that your brother forced you to attack us."

More tricks that you fell for! Poisonedsap thought in satisfaction, narrowing her eyes. She had known that she would need to put on an act in order to infiltrate ShadowClan. But Maplefur had made it easier than she could have ever imagined.

"Our leader then, Stormstar, wanted to have you killed. "

Poisonedsap's tail lashed in annoyance as the cream tabby continued his recap. *Why are you telling me this? I was there, mouse brain!*

"But I thought you deserved a chance." Maplefur stared at her. "I vouched for you. And when every cat in the clan mistrusted you, I was there, and I treated you well." He narrowed his eyes. "And now, you tell me I can't see my own kits anymore. You wouldn't even have them if it weren't for me. You wouldn't *be* here if it weren't for me."

As he spoke, Poisonedsap's irritation faded, replaced by an odd new feeling. She sank her claws deeper into the earth. Suddenly, a different mindset flicked on inside her brain, a tiny flickering light in her mind of darkness. Thoughts and memories from the cat she had been seasons ago were returning to her, subtle and distant, yet they were there.

Maplefur has treated me well. She studied him. So many seasons had passed since the time she had dreamed of love and finding that perfect tom. Once, she thought she had. *But I was wrong.* She had learned a valuable lesson. That all toms were terrible and rotten to their core. They only ever used she-cats to manipulate and hurt.

Besides his stupidity, Maplefur seemed very much like the kind of mate this younger Poisonedsap had always hoped for. *Perhaps if things had been different...* Dark memories swarmed her mind. Claws slashing open her cheek. A tiny kit wailing. Tears running down her face as she dealt a killing bite.

The memories screamed and tormented her mind, killing the tiny light and leaving her brain in darkness once again. *No! There is no such thing as love between mates. No such thing as a good tom. Deep down, Maplefur is just like the rest of him.* On top of that, he was a fool and a huge nuisance. But now, he was also a threat to her plan.

Poisonedsap continued to study her mate. "And you have treated me well, Maplefur," She said calmly and honestly. "And for that, I'm grateful." She let out a purr. "But I'm afraid that I don't need you anymore."

This tom had given her the first two kits she needed in her plan. It was a shame that he couldn't give her more, or be ambitious enough to be involved in the plot. *Oh Maplefur, where will I ever find another tom as stupid as you?*

Maplefur narrowed his eyes. "Maybe you don't. But the kits do." His tail twitched slowly. He was not backing down. "I love them, and you can't stop me."

"I don't think you understand." Poisonedsap frowned. *I need* them. And you can't stop me. "Perhaps I need to elaborate." The night was silent as she held Maplefur's defiant gaze. *These kits will be strong. They do not need a father who will weaken them.* With a snarl of hatred, she lunged at him with outstretched claws. *These kits only need their mother!*

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Seasons ago...

The snowstorm seemed endless on this cold, dreadful night. Twolegplace was blanketed in layers of white. A black and white she-cat trudged through snow up to her belly. She carried a tiny golden she-kit by the scruff, and a little black tom nestled

between her boney shoulders.

Her legs trembled with each pawstep, her bones aching terribly from the bitter cold. She could no longer feel her paws, for they were frozen. *How am I still moving...?* She didn't dare stop walking, for if she did, she was afraid she wouldn't be able to start again. *My kits... They need shelter.*

A torn, dirty purple collar hung around her neck, a dirty bell jingling quietly as she moved. Her once fluffy tail dragged in the snow behind her. She squinted as flurries blew at her, stinging her face and sticking to her eyelids.

Her name was Sophie. A few weeks ago, she had been plump and well fed. A spoiled, happy kittypet in a loving home. Her housefolk were a younger couple who pet her, fed her canned food, and gave her a warm bed by the couch. All had been perfect. But then her housefolk began to argue more and more each day and ignored her. It was during this time that Sophie had met another kittypet, a golden tabby named Chester, and became pregnant with his kits.

Perhaps this will make them happy again! Sophie had thought. She imagined how her twolegs would smile and laugh as they played with her kits. Every day, she tried to get their attention, meowing at them and showing off her belly. Finally, they seemed to understand the news she was trying to share. But it only made them argue more. Sophie spent these days laying in her bed depressed with her chin on her paws.

It wasn't long before the female twoleg left. Sophie was hurt and confused. Every time one of her housefolk left through that door, they would return later that day. But days and nights went by, and the female twoleg did not return. The male twoleg had grown quiet and easily agitated. He ignored her, and some days forgot to feed her. He never pet her or even looked at her.

Sophie had continued to spend her days sleeping in her kittypet bed by the couch, depressed as her belly grew bigger and bigger. Two weeks ago, the twoleg had not fed her all day. Sophie had begun crying at him for food, but he didn't move from the couch, only yelled at her. Hurt but still hungry, she had begun meowing more

insistently. Suddenly, the twoleg had shot to his feet, yelling angrily before grabbing her. To her horror, he opened the door and threw her down onto the snowy porch before slamming the door shut.

For hours, Sophie had scratched at the door, crying and yowling. But it did not open. She realized that she needed to accept the heartbreaking truth. She was no longer welcome in her home.

She decided to go to Chester's house in hopes that his housefolk would take her in. She'd seen her mate in the window, and he had scratched on the inside of the door to get the attention of his twolegs. But the moment the door opened and they saw Sophie, they shut the door. Chester could only look out the window helplessly and shake his head. She was not wanted here either.

In these past few weeks, she had begun struggling for survival. It was rare to find food on the streets in the winter. Every few days, a twoleg saw her and took pity on her, giving her a bit of food. It was enough to keep her alive. She crawled under the porch of a twoleg nest where she gave birth to her two kits. But how could she keep them alive when she was having a hard enough time herself?

As Sophie forced her weak, frozen body onward, the kit on her shoulders sneezed and let out a cry as his belly rumbled. *They haven't eaten in days...* Sophie's own stomach no longer growled with hunger, for it was used to being empty now. *They're running out of time.*

She trembled as she raised her head against the wind. A huge house stood up ahead on the end of the street. The porch was huge with white pillars on each corner. Golden light shone from the windows, the only sign of warmth in the freezing night. *Some twolegs may not accept a fully grown cat. But no twoleg could turn away kits.*

Sophie stumbled onward onto the snow covered lawn. Her weak and frozen body trembled as she forced herself to walk. *Just a little further... For the kits...* She heaved her frozen paws up the steps, almost tripping over them as she reached the top. She gently dropped the golden kit in front of the tall brown door and carefully lowered the black kit from her shoulders. She trembled as she stared at them.

The tom kit squeaked and stared up at her with huge yellow eyes. His sister huddled close, and he pushed his face into her shoulder for warmth.

It broke Sophie's heart to leave them. But she would not feel that way for long. *I can feel it...* She touched her icy nose to each of her kits. "Stay here," She whispered. "You'll be safe and happy here." Stepping back, she summoned all the strength she had left to yowl at the top of her lungs.

She yowled and wailed until she saw a shadow move inside the glowing window. She turned and half stumbled, half fell down the steps, pulling herself behind a snowy bush. She trembled in the snow as the door opened, and a couple of twolegs appeared. Their faces lit with shock at the sight of the kits, and they crouched, each scooping one up and speaking anxiously to each other.

While the twoleg holding the golden kit rushed into the house, the other stayed in the doorway, looking around for whoever might have left the kits. Sophie did not move. *They don't want me. No one does.* After a moment, the twoleg turned away and closed the door.

Sophie smiled for the first time in weeks. *They're safe... My kits are safe.* She managed to stumble a little further down the street. By the sidewalk, she saw a torn sofa some twoleg had thrown out. It reminded her of the bed she used to sleep on by the couch. She found the strength to drag herself up onto the sofa. It was ripped and covered in snow. But she decided it was a good place to die. Letting her trembling body rest on the cushion, she let out a sigh and closed her eyes for the last time.

Chapter 1

The golden she-cat crept forward, her amber eyes fixed on her target. *Almost... Almost...* Her black tipped tail waved excitedly as she wiggled her haunches and sprang, sharp claws outstretched. Now!

With a squeal of delight, the kit pounced on her prey- a little fuzzy pink toy mouse with a tail of red yarn. She pinned it beneath her sharp kitten claws, beaming down at it proudly. "I landed right on it! Did you see, Scritch? It was the best pounce ever!"

The bell on her pink collar jingled as she raised her head. A black kit dashed out from under a velvet sofa and across the carpet to her, his red collar bell jingling, and his yellow eyes lit with amazement. "Wow! That was really good, Sappy." He dropped his chin to the carpet. "I bet I can do better though."

Sappy hurried aside to watch as her brother sprang at the toy mouse, but did not land as perfectly as she had. With a squeaky growl of annoyance, he hooked the mouse by it's yawn tail in his claws. "Let's play another game. Catch!" He flung the toy at his sister.

With a meow of laughter, she shot into the air and bat the pink mouse back at Scritch.

This house was the home of Sappy and Scritch, the only home they had ever known. They were cared for by a middle aged twoleg couple, who no doubt loved them dearly. Their housefolk gave them toys, treats, fluffy cat beds, far more than any cat could dream of.

Their home was a big and wonderful place. The living room was where the kits slept, and it was their favorite place to play. The kitchen had a beautiful light thing on the ceiling that their housefolk called a "chandelier". They weren't big enough to climb the staircase on their own yet, but when they were, Sappy couldn't

wait to see what lay up there.

Despite never having seen the outside world, Sappy felt certain that she and Scritch were very lucky. She couldn't be happier. She lived a carefree life that consisted of eating tuna and treats, bowls of creamy milk, and playing with her brother, Scritch.

Sappy raised a black paw as the toy mouse bounced at her feet, but before she could swat it, a familiar jingling sound came from behind her. Twitching an ear, she spun to see that one of their housefolk, the female, was home, fiddling with the set of strange metal claws she used to open the door.

"She's back!" Scritch's black ears perked eagerly. "You know what that means?"

"Dinner!" With a squeak, Sappy spun and bounded across the room, her brother hard on her paws.

The bells on their collars jingled as they ran, and the twoleg smiled broadly at the sound, crouching to greet them. Sappy rubbed her whiskers against the left leg, while Scritch arched his back against the right knee, letting out an insistent high pitched meow.

Their twoleg said something in her strange twoleg language and stood, walking over to the kitchen. The kits hurried after her, trotting around her huge twoleg feet as she moved.

In the kitchen, Sappy and Scritch paced back and forth by the counter, their little tails high in the air as they mewed impatiently. The twoleg seemed to be taking forever to open the can of food.

I'm starving! Sappy thought, though she had just eaten this morning.

At last, the twoleg divided the food into two silver bowls and leaned over to place them on the floor. Sappy and Scritch each rushed to their bowl and eagerly dug in to their meal. *Tuna again!* She thought, swiping her tongue over her muzzle. *My favorite!*

The twoleg smiled and gave them each a brief stroke on the back before leaving them to eat to their hearts' content.

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As the sun set, Sappy sat on a cushion by the windowsill, staring out at the foreign world. She had no desire to ever set paw outside. Yet it fascinated her to see the strange path that monsters rolled across, the tall trees, the twolegs that walked by. She often saw other animals, though she had no idea what they were. Strange ones that could fly through the air, and brown ones that seemed a little like cats, but had long ears or bushy tails.

Scritch leaped up beside her and peered out the window. "Did you see any of those barking things? The big animals that walk with the twolegs?"

"Not today," Sappy purred. "Aren't they weird?" She paused as she gazed out at the outside world. "Scritch, do you think there are others like us?"

"Cats?" Her brother frowned. "I don't know. I've never seen any. Maybe we're the only ones, and that's why the housefolk treat us so well."

That makes sense. Sappy thought with a flash of admiration for her brother. *He's so smart. What would I do without him?* "But wouldn't it be great if there were others? We could make friends!" She thought of all the fun she had with Scritch during the day. What if there were other cats to laugh and play with?

Scritch purred in amusement. "I think it would be weird. Besides," He added with a playful nudge. "I don't need other cats when I have you. We're best friends, and we only need each other."

"That's true." Sappy purred and looked away from the window, which no longer seemed important. "Even when we're old and grumpy!"

Her brother laughed. "Maybe you'll be grumpy, but I won't!" He tapped her on the nose and leaped off the cushion, and she rushed after him.

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That evening, like any other, was peaceful and relaxing. The orange glow of the lamp filled the room in a comforting golden hue. Their housefolk always made time for the kits at the end of the day. The female sat, dragging a string across the carpet as Sappy darted after it. The male twoleg sat on the sofa with Scritch, who curled up into a tiny black ball in his lap.

Two tall, thin candles stood on a silver base atop the coffee table, flickering soothing yellow lights. Whenever these strange candles were lit, the living room smelled quite splendid. It made Sappy feel comfortable and safe.

The male twoleg made a sound and gently lifted Scritch from his lap, setting him on the carpet before standing. The female twoleg rose as well, giving Sappy a stroke on the head and Scritch and scratch on the chin. Sappy blinked contently. It was time for the housefolk to go to sleep.

The female twoleg turned off the lamp, then said something to the male, gesturing to the candles as she headed upstairs. He nodded and started toward the coffee table, then stopped suddenly, grasping his stomach with one hand. A look of discomfort and panic spread across his face.

The kits watched, puzzled, as the twoleg turned and fled up the stairs into the pale room. Sappy did not know what was in this room, only that there was a strange roaring sound that came from it before one of her housefolk exited.

Sappy exchanged a confused look with Scritch. *Was their twoleg alright?* Several minutes later, the familiar roar sounded, and the twoleg emerged from the room, looking relieved. Instead of returning to the living room, he disappeared up the stairs.

As she stared after him, Scritch stretched his jaws wide in a yawn. "Time to sleep!"

"But wait..." Sappy turned to look at the candles on the table. "The housefolk always put out those lights before they go to sleep."

Scritch shrugged. "I guess he forgot." He turned and climbed into

their bed, a fluffy red cushion.

Sappy hesitated as she watched the two tiny flames. *Something doesn't feel right...* "I think we should put out the lights."

"Us?" Scritch blinked as he kneaded the cushion. "How?"

She jumped up onto the coffee table and pondered this question as she studied the candles. *The housefolk always put them out somehow with their mouths... Do they just breathe on them?* She craned her neck forward and exhaled as she parted her jaws. The flames didn't disappear. She frowned and tilted her head, raising a paw and waving it near the flame. It felt warm.

"Sappy, be careful!"

She heard her brother's concerned meow and could see him staring from the corner of her eye, but ignored him, mesmerized by the tiny golden light in front of her. *So pretty, so mysterious... Does it only disappear when the housefolk tell it to? Maybe if I...* She stretched out a paw and tapped at the smooth white candlestick.

Her heart skipped a beat as the candle leaned to the side and fell from its' silver base. In that brief moment as it descended toward the floor, Sappy thought. *I've broken it! The light will disappear, now.*

But in the second that followed, Sappy knew she'd been very very wrong. The peaceful evening ignited into disaster.

The candle hit the carpet, but the flame did not disappear or shrink. It grew. The bright golden light blazed upon the carpet, flames awakened and stretched tall beside the table.

"Sappy!" Scritch cried in alarm.

Panic shot through Sappy from whisker to tail as she scrambled from the table and rushed to his side. She spun to see the fire quickly spreading, ripping up the carpet and climbing the sofas.

What have I done?! The golden glow was no longer comforting. It was terrifying. She took a step back only to shriek out as hot pain seared her hind paw. "It hurts! This light hurts us!" She fled toward

the kitchen. "Scritch, hurry!"

The kitchen too was becoming engulfed by flames. The lights from the chandelier seemed to have escaped their glass prisons, free and dancing across the room. Sappy's mind whirled with panic as she fled blindly across the floor, which was quickly heating up beneath her pads.

Suddenly, a sharp beeping squealed above the roar of the flames, a sound similar to the strange flying creatures outside, only faster and high pitched. Sappy's tiny heart exploded with terror at the alarm, and she reared back into Scritch, who let out a frightened cry. It seemed to be coming from the ceiling above them. The ringing pierced through her head, and she shut her eyes, desperate to escape the noise.

Everything is so loud and scary! She let out a terrified cry and spun, thrusting her muzzle against Scritch's flank. "Run, back to the living room!" Anything was better than this terrifying sound.

Her brother's little claws scrabbled at the floor as he took off, and Sappy raced after him. A heavy haze of gray smoke had filled the room. It smelled horrible, and she coughed as she ran through it.

"We have to get out of here!" Scritch wheezed and bounded across the burning carpet. "The window!"

His black tail vanished behind a wall of flames, and Sappy squinted through the smoke as she zig zagged after him. Scritch leaped onto the cushion by the window, scratching desperately at the glass with his tiny claws. Sappy hurried to his side and scrabbled at the window with him, but her claws slid harmlessly over the smooth surface. Outside, she saw huge red monsters with spinning lights on their heads. But there was no time to question Scritch about them.

"It's no use!" Scritch wailed.

She ignored him and scratched more rapidly in a panic. "We have to keep trying!" There was a crackling sound above her head, but she ignored it, focusing on breaking through the window. *Please let us out! Please!*

WHOOSH

"Look out!" Scritch slammed into Sappy, who let out a startled cry as she was knocked clear off the cushion and onto the carpet, scrambling to her paws just before she rolled into a patch of flame. She swung her gaze up just in time to see a flaming piece of the curtain fall onto Scritch's head.

Her brother let out a scream of agony that sent a lightning bolt of panic through her. Her paws were frozen to the ground as she watched her brother shake his head desperately to escape the burning cloak, rolling off of the cushion.

Go! He needs help! She jolted forward and dug her claws into the curtain piece, hardly aware of her pads burning as she tugged it off of her brother's head.

Scritch wailed and stumbled before collapsing, letting out a groan of pain. As Sappy crouched by his side, the front door slammed open. But there was no familiar jingle, nor was it their housefolk entering. Instead, a pawful of strange twolegs rushed inside, stomping with huge boots and wearing bright yellow pelts.

Great, now we're being attacked! But at the sight of the open door, Sappy knew it was their only chance to escape. She nudged her brother urgently with her muzzle. "Come on!"

Scritch only wheezed and moaned in response, his eyes squeezed shut. Thinking quickly, Sappy grasped his collar in her teeth and half led, half dragged him toward the door. He stumbled alongside her, unable to stay on his paws on his own.

A new sense of fear rushed through Sappy as she and Scritch stepped out onto the porch. The outside world. The steps were cold, a new experience that might have scared her if not for the way it soothed her burnt pads. The cold night air chilled her fur. Twolegs in yellow pelts swarmed the front yard, while their huge red monsters wailed behind them.

We have to hide from them! She quickened her pace, and Scritch mewled weakly in protest as he was dragged down the steps. Sappy

led him across the lawn and crawled under the shelter of a bush. She released Scritch's collar, and he slumped onto his stomach beside her, trembling.

Sappy shivered and stared at the scene. She had never seen their home from the outside. It looked frightening, though she was sure it looked much different when it wasn't in flames. She was relieved to see their housefolk among those twolegs with yellow pelts, looking shaken, but alright. *They must have escaped another way. Are those strangers here to help them?*

Scritch whimpered, and she snapped her attention down to him. "Scritch! Are you-" She broke off and let out a shriek.

In the chaos of escaping the house, she hadn't gotten a good look at her brother's face. Now, she almost wished she hadn't. The soft black fur around his eyes and muzzle was gone. Instead, his face bore patches of charred, burnt flesh, red and brown with glistening trails and patches of blood.

Scritch's yellow eyes were glazed and half shut as he tried to meet her frightened gaze. "W-what's wrong?" He rasped. "Is... Is it bad?"

For a long moment, Sappy didn't know how to answer, or even describe the condition of his face. It scared her to look at. *But I need to be strong for him...* She swallowed, her voice shaking as she spoke. "I-it's not good... But it'll be okay." She wished she could believe her own words.

As she leaned down and gently licked Scritch's head, dread and shame washed over her. *This is all my fault... I knocked over the candle! I nearly killed us. I destroyed our home.* She paused and stared across the lawn at her housefolk. They were trying to comfort one another.

I've never seen them so upset... Sappy flattened her ears in distress. *Do they know it's my fault? They must! They'll throw me and Scritch out for sure!* Staring at their burning home as the yellow pelted twolegs put out the fire with snakes, she only knew one thing. *It isn't our home anymore.*

Chapter 2

The cold woke Sappy. Her eyes still shut, she shivered and pressed closer to Scritch, imagining they were in their bed. *Why is the house so cold today? Did the housefolk leave a window open?* As she grew consciousness, a chill of alarm shot through her. *I'm not in our bed. It's prickly and cold under me!* Her eyes snapped open.

A veil of soft leaves and branches shivered before her in a breeze. Beyond them lay the road, and several huge houses. It was morning. It only took a few moments for Sappy to remember where she was, and the devastating events of last night.

I knocked over the candle. Sappy thought guiltily. *I started the fire, and we almost died... We left the house and spent the night under this bush.* She looked beside her.

Scritch lay asleep on his side, an expression of pain fixed on his charred face as he breathed slowly. Part of her didn't want to wake him, and let him sleep off the pain. But they needed to decide what to do.

She shifted onto her paws into a crouch and touched her nose to her brother's cheek. "Scritch," She whispered. The black kit moaned in response and opened his burnt eyelids only slightly, peering up at her with yellow slits.

He's in so much pain! Sappy's heart broke, and she wanted to wail in despair at his condition. I need to be strong for him. He needs me. Her voice shook as she mewed. "We need to go find help."

"Help...?" Scritch blinked slowly, as if having difficulty processing her words. "F-for what?"

"For you... Your face." Sappy meowed quietly. "How do you feel?"

Scritch lifted his head slowly. "Hurts..." He sighed and let his head thump to the ground again. He mumbled something into the grass.

"What?" Sappy leaned closer, pricking her ears.

"Are you okay?" He repeated in a raspy mew.

Me? You're the one whose face is scorched! Sappy's ears flattened miserably. *It should have been me instead. Poor Scritch!* "I'm okay," She said quietly, though as she spoke and thought about this, she became aware of the pain in her pads. Lifting one black paw to examine it, she saw that her pads were bright red and tender. *I must have burnt them while running through the flames.*

"We can't go home... Can we?" Scritch whispered, staring up at her through glazed eyes. "They... They won't forgive us."

Sappy shut her eyes, her heart sinking. *He's right. How could our housefolk ever look at us the same way? They could have died in the fire, too!* "We'll find a new place to call home, Scritch." She tried to sound brave. "I promise."

As Scritch let out a low whimper, Sappy rose to her paws, wincing as she stood on her burnt pads. "Can you get up?" She asked.

"I think so..." Scritch trembled as he slowly sat, then stumbled into a standing position. "W-where will we go?"

Sappy hesitated, suddenly overwhelmed by the question. *I've never been outside before! The world is so big and scary... I don't even know which places are safe!* But Scritch needed her. She needed to find him help.

"Let's go to one of the other houses." She decided, though unsure of herself. "Other housefolk must live in those. Or maybe other animals?"

"Other animals?" Scritch stumbled forward and nearly fell.

Sappy hurried to his side and allowed him to lean on her shoulder as they slowly walked toward the road. "Yes. Like the barking and flying ones."

"C-can they talk?" Scritch wondered.

"They must." When they reached the road, a monster roared passed them. Both kits immediately shrank back, frightened. *They're huge! They didn't look as big from the window!*

"I-I don't want to cross it." Scritch swallowed. "Let's stay on this side."

Sappy couldn't agree more. She felt nervous and vulnerable out in the open world, with no roof over her head or walls keeping her safe. The two of them walked unsteadily down the sidewalk and up a driveway.

"Wait here," She told Scritch, and he sat hunched over as she nervously headed up the steps and onto the porch. Could there be housefolk in there? She hesitated, then raised a paw and scratched her claws at the doorframe. She drew back warily and waited. Nothing. She let out a high pitched meow and listened for a response. Nothing.

"Maybe no one is home." Scritch sighed.

Sappy waited a few moments longer before her tail drooped. But as she returned to her brother, she tried to be confident. "There are lots of other houses," She pointed out. "Let's try them."

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Sappy and Scritch spent the whole morning padding up and down the road and visiting houses. Most of the time, the door did not open. Whether someone inside could not hear Sappy or simply ignored her, she did not know.

They had started up the driveway to one house when a vicious barking broke out from the backyard. The barking creature frightened the kits so badly, they didn't dare get any closer.

At two houses, housefolk opened the door, but the first shooed the kittens away, and the other screamed in horror at the sight of Scritch.

The sun was high in the sky now. Sappy didn't know how far they'd traveled, or where they were. Every corner they turned, they

discovered more roads and more rows of houses. Her pads were sore from walking, her tail dragging behind her.

Scritch moved slower and slower until he gave into his exhaustion and groaned, plopping onto a lawn. "I can't walk anymore!" He wailed. "I feel awful!"

"We have to!" Sappy protested, crouching beside him. "We need to find a home."

Suddenly, her brother's ears pricked. "Look!" He gasped.

She turned her head and froze. On the other side of the lawn near a fenced porch stood one of the strange flying things. It was dark gray with a red chest, and beady eyes. It hopped forward in the grass and paused, studying the ground.

The flying thing! Maybe It can help us! Sappy immediately crept toward it slowly and nervously. "H-hello!"

The creature did not respond, but flicked it's head in her direction.

"I-I'm sorry to bother you!" She tried to hide the fear in her voice as she met it's beady gaze. "Please, me and my brother need help."

The flying creature stared at her a moment longer, then turned and flapped away into the air.

"Wait, come back!" Sappy cried and ran forward a few paces. She stopped at the end of the lawn and stared up helplessly as the animal disappeared into the trees.

Sappy sighed and closed her eyes. *What did I say to upset it?*

"Were you... Talking to that bird?"

The sound sent a bolt of shock through her body, and she froze. That wasn't Scritch's voice. She found the courage to spin around, and her eyes widened in amazement.

A cat!

A golden brown tabby tom sat on the porch a little ways from her, his head tilted as he watched her. He was much bigger than her, a fully grown cat. He looked plump and thick furred, and wore a red collar, like Scritch.

Sappy couldn't take her eyes off him. *Another cat! There really are others! I thought Scritch and I were the only ones!* She jerked her head toward her brother, who was staring at the tom in just as much shock.

"Well?" The cat twitched his tail.

Sappy's voice cracked. "W-what?"

"You were talking to a bird." The tom's whiskers twitched in amusement. "You know birds don't talk, right?"

"Bird...?" Scritch stumbled to Sappy's side and stared at the cat. "Is that what that flying thing is called?"

The golden tabby blinked. "Yes...? Haven't you-" He broke off, his yellow eyes widening. "Oh my whiskers! What happened to your face?" He hopped down the steps to meet them.

Scritch lowered his head in embarrassment, trying to hide his face with his paw.

Sappy tried to shake off the shock of not being the only cat in the world. They sought out for help. And this cat could help them! "We were in a fire," She explained anxiously. "Scritch was burnt very badly. Please, we need help."

The tom's eyes lit with sympathy. "You poor kits!" He returned his gaze to Scritch, who was still covering his face with his arm. "Let me see," He prompted gently.

"Let him, Scritch," She urged anxiously. "He can help you."

The kit hesitated and slowly lowered his paw, looking up at the cat miserably.

"My, my..." He leaned forward and sniffed at Scritch's face. "You're

lucky you weren't blinded! You're very brave."

"So can you help him?" Sappy asked hopefully.

The cat frowned. "I once burned my pads walking across the stove when I was a dumb kit. The vet gave me ointment, and when my housefolk put it on my paws, I felt much better."

Sappy didn't know what many of those words meant. "Can you give some 'ointment' to Scritch?"

"Oh, no." He looked embarrassed. "My housefolk threw it out when my paws were better." He paused. "But cool water helped too." He waved his tail. "There's a little pond in the backyard. Come on."

Sappy and Scritch followed the stranger along the side of the house and into the backyard. She was immediately awestruck by how colorful it was. Most of the yard was taken up by a garden of pretty pink, blue, yellow, and red flowers. In the center lay a little pond, lined with flat stones.

The golden tabby crouched beside the water and motioned with his tail for Scritch to join him. "Lay down facing the water," He instructed. "I'll gently splash it onto your face."

"Okay..." Scritch lay beside the pond, watching it nervously. "What if I fall in?"

The cat purred. "Even if you do, it isn't deep at all. Don't worry."

Scritch closed his eyes, and Sappy sat, watching as the tom flicked his paw into the water, gently splashing it at the kit's face.

Scritch flinched at first, then relaxed, sighing. "That feels good."

Sappy relaxed too, relieved to see that her brother was in less discomfort. *I'm so glad we found this cat!* She studied him, reminding herself how odd it was to see another of their species. He was so much bigger than they were. *Is that how big we'll be someday?* His voice was deeper, his fur thicker and less soft.

The tom noticed her staring and looked amused. "Haven't you seen

another cat before?"

She shook her head. "Me and Scritch thought we were the only ones."

The cat laughed. "Oh, no! There are hundreds, maybe even thousands of us!"

"Really?" Her eyes widened. "All in these houses?"

"No, no," He purred. "Not all. There are cats who live out on the streets, in the forest. Everywhere."

Cats live outside willingly?? Sappy couldn't believe her ears. *That's crazy!*

"What are your names?" The tom asked.

"I'm Sappy," She introduced herself. "And my brother is Scritch."

The tom's whiskers twitched. "Those are unusual names," He purred. "But I like them."

"What's your name?" Sappy prompted, wondering what name wasn't unusual.

The golden tabby cat pulled his paw from the pond and shook it dry before sitting up. "My name is Chester." He turned his head. "How are you feeling, Scritch?"

"Much better." Scritch sighed and sat up, his face sleek with water. "Thank you."

Chester nodded, though he looked concerned. "Why are you out here all alone? Where is your mother?"

"Mother?" Sappy frowned and exchanged a puzzled look with Scritch. "We don't have a mother."

"Of course you do. Everyone has a mother."

Scritch shrugged. "If we did, we never knew her. We only remember

the housefolk."

"I suppose that's the way it is for most kits adopted at a young age." Chester looked sympathetic.

Sappy hesitated. *We need a new home. And Chester seems very nice!* This house looked very different and much smaller than the one they knew. But it could still be a home. "Chester... Me and Scritch need a place to stay." She stared up at him. "Please, would your housefolk take us in?"

Chester's yellow eyes widened, and Sappy hoped he was considering it. But his answer came very quickly, and not the one she wanted to hear. "No. I'm sorry, but my housefolk only want one cat." He shifted his paws awkwardly. "I had a mate during the winter who was expecting my kits. I wanted her to stay here with me, but my housefolk rejected her."

"Oh..." Sappy's tail drooped. "I guess they would reject us, too." Scritch looked at his paws, clearly just as disappointed.

"I'm so sorry." Chester's eyes shone with guilt. "If I could control their minds, I'd let you stay." He tried to sound more positive. "But I'm sure you'll find a nice home of your own."

They sat in awkward silence for a long moment. Sappy stared at her paws. *I miss our warm bed, our toy mice, our cushion... I miss home.* But we can never go back home.

At last, Chester broke the silence. "You can spend the night here in the yard if you'd like. In the morning, you can keep looking for new housefolk."

"Thank you," Scritch meowed.

***

It was night now. After Chester bid them good night and went inside, Sappy and Scritch settled in the garden under a shrub for the night. They were exhausted. *I've never walked so much in my life!*

They'd been laying there for a while when suddenly, Scritch sighed.

"I don't want to keep trekking up and down roads, Sappy. I don't want to face more dogs or angry housefolk throwing things at me, or screaming at the sight of me."

Sappy's heart sank. "Scritch-"

"Chester said there are cats that live outside." Scritch stared across the yard, as though imagining the cats beyond the fences. "Maybe... Maybe we can do that."

Sappy stared at him in disbelief. "You're joking!" When Scritch didn't reply, she sighed. "We'll talk about it tomorrow." She pressed her flank against his and rested her chin on her paws.

As crickets chirped softly in the night, Sappy thought about Scritch's idea. It scared her, but excited her at the same time. *Maybe he's right. Maybe we don't belong in a house anymore...*

Part 3

Little holiday surprise!I've decided I won't be properly writing the rest of Poisonedsap's Rise. So I have written a detailed summary of the rest of the story, along with art of scenes to bring it to life a little more!

Hope you enjoy!

Into the City

After leaving Chester's home, Sappy and Scritch venture further into twolegplace, until they find themselves on busy streets with alleyways and taller buildings than they've ever seen. Feeling they have no other choice, they beg and struggle for food. They sometimes find other strays and they try to be polite, but these cats are aggressive and refuse to share their scraps.

After several days with little to no food, Sappy desperately asks a young she-cat and her friends if they'll share some scraps. They laugh and say no, and when Sappy continues pressing, the lead she-cat kicks Sappy and sends her rolling into a trash can.

The other cats leave, and Scritch rushes to comfort his sister as she recovers and shakes herself. She whimpers "We'll never have a full meal again!"

Suddenly, there's a voice above her: "Not with that attitude." Down from the trash can leaps a gray-brown tom. The kits are initially wary of him, seeing his rougher fur parted with tiny scratches from battle. He is a senior cat who clearly still has the strength to match a younger cat in battle any day. He stands with authority and resilience, yet there is a warmness in his copper eyes.

[image]

This cat introduces himself as Whiskey, leader of one of the cat gangs in this part of twolegplace. Sympathizing with Sappy and Scritch, he invites them to join his group, explaining that they will toughen them up and teach them to fight for survival.

Sappy and Scritch are unsure, but agree to go with Whiskey to meet this gang. They go to the alleyway they call home and meet Jericho, Bandit, Shingles, Diesel, Marshal, and two young cats about their age called Roxy and Drizzle.

Sappy and Scritch are delighted when they're offered scraps of chicken and french fries and dig right in. After they eat, Sappy explains to the gang that she and Scritch used to be housecats and were hoping to find new twolegs to stay with. Some of the cats exchange looks, and Shingles grunts "No twolegs will want a kit with a face like that", gesturing to Scritch, who drops his gaze almost shamefully. Jericho scolds Shingles for his blunt statement.

However Whiskey solemnly agrees that twolegs can be cruel and unwelcoming to strays. He seems to have a bad history with twolegs. He tells Sappy that she may have a chance, however, to find a new home with twolegs if it's what she wants. Sappy considers this, longing for toys and a warm pillow to sleep on at night. But Scritch is staring back at her so sadly. She knows she could never leave him. They must always stay together. Dismissing her own desires, she agrees to join Whiskey's Gang with Scritch.

Life in the Gang

Four moons pass, and Sappy and Scritch have settled well into the gang and are apprentice-aged cats. Whiskey has taken them under his own wing and has taught them to scavenge for food, even hunt the odd mouse they find. Perhaps more importantly, he's taught them to fight and defend themselves.

Scritch is closer with Whiskey than Sappy is. He has become a father figure to him, and Scritch is often by his side observing how he leads the group and offering assistance whenever he can.

Like he did Sappy and Scritch, Whiskey sometimes offers small amounts of food to other strays down on their luck, or lets

trespassers off with a warning. Scritch disapproves and argues against this, believing the gang should only look after themselves. Sappy is surprised at this, wondering if her brother has forgotten what it's like to be starving and alone. She thinks it's right to help outsiders.

Scritch is sometimes teased about his face by other strays they come across. Some of them pity him and assume he's weak because of the injury, and this frustrates him. One day after he's mocked by someone, Sappy hears him growl under his breath "I'm strong. I'll prove that to them."

[image]

Draco's Gang

Sappy, Scritch, and a couple other cats are scavenging for food when they run into another group of cats they've never seen before, almost as large as theirs. Alarmed, Sappy rushes back to the ally camp to tell Whiskey, and he hurries to the scene with his cats.

A maroon tabby tom with amber eyes introduces himself as Draco, leader of this gang. He wears a black collar that is ragged and worn. Scritch daringly mocks Draco, calling him a housecat, but the leader briefly explains that he was a housecat seasons ago, but not anymore. He is much younger than Whiskey, but very sensible.

Whiskey is wary of Draco, but after both gangs promise they have no intentions of fighting or stealing, they decide to work together to scavenge for food and protect one another in times of need.

[image]

Boone

As Draco and Whiskey's gangs mingle, Sappy meets a young green eyed dark gray tabby named Boone, who is about her age. He wears a brown collar with a rusty tag. He's very friendly and he explains that he lived with twolegs with his brother, Clay, when they were kits. But the twolegs were irresponsible and neglected them, often forgetting to give them food and water. One day while playing in

the yard, Draco came across them and noticed how malnourished they were and offered them a life on the streets, which was surprisingly better in this case.

Boone admits he might have liked to find a better twoleg home, and Sappy agrees, telling him how she would have kept looking for one if not for Scritch. But she enjoys her life now anyway. Boone admires her devotion to her brother and tells her about his brother in Draco's Gang, Clay, and how they're close as well.

[image]

Sappy has toughened up since joining Whiskey's Gang, but she is still polite and level-headed. When she spends time with Boone, she finds herself able to let loose and be more fun and playful. She realizes she's falling in love with him, and he's just the kind of tom she's looking for.

Scritch notices how much time Sappy is spending with Boone and disapproves, aggravated with how every cat is trusting Draco's Gang. He argues with Whiskey that Draco will eventually steal their food and territory, but Whiskey doesn't believe Draco has any bad intentions. He reminds Scritch "It is better to have allies than enemies".

A dog gets loose in the alley, and both gangs fight it off together. The cats celebrate that night, and Whiskey and Draco agree that their groups are stronger together, even proposing uniting their gangs in the near future. Sappy is excited at the idea, as she can share a den with Boone. Every cat is feeling pretty good about the future. Scritch is absolutely furious and leaves the party.

[image]

That night after the celebration, Boone takes Sappy up to a rooftop, showing her how beautiful the view of the city is from up high. Sappy feels happier than she's ever remembered and can't wait for their gangs to join together. Boone agrees, saying there's no cat in Draco's Gang like her. They want to become mates, and even have a family someday. It begins lightly raining, filling a little dip in the concrete, and Sappy and Boone share a drink of water together.

[image]

Part 4

Murder and Vengeance

The next morning, Whiskey is found dead just outside his territory with a terrible throat wound. Every cat is shocked. Sappy sadly recalls how Whiskey took her and Scritch in when they needed it. Scritch is furious, yowling that Draco's Gang has killed Whiskey. Some cats are unsure of this claim, but when Scritch points out every cat had their guard down during the celebration, they agree it makes sense.

Having been so close with Whiskey, Scritch assumes leadership of the gang and vows vengeance on Draco's Gang. Sappy is worried about Boone and hopes he can defend himself.

[image]

New Image

As Scritch begins launching attacks on Draco's Gang, he decides that everyone in his gang needs tougher names to strike fear into their enemies. He considers "Shred" for himself, as his claws are far more capable of shredding than scritching. He then extends it to "Bone Shred", vowing to shred Draco down to the bone.

Sappy is surprised at this, but before she can question him he turns and announces she will be called "Poisoned Sap". She's startled and initially rejects it, but Bone Shred insists it makes her sound fierce and dangerous. She considers this, thinking of how cats might respect her more, and finds herself liking the idea of power. She agrees to take on the new name, though Bone Shred hasn't given her much choice.

Poisoned Sap is very aware of how Bone Shred has changed since Whiskey's death, but realizes she has changed as well. She is just as hurt and angry about Whiskey's murder. She participates in attacks on Draco's Gang and finds the yowls and blood of her enemies

satisfying. However she always avoids Boone. They haven't spoken in over a moon at this point.

Draco's Gang continues to deny any responsibility for Whiskey's death, but Bone Shred won't believe them and relentlessly continues his raids.

During this time, Bone Shred becomes mates with Roxy. They have a single kit together, and following his new naming style, Bone Shred names her Shredded Ivy.

Bone Shred does not necessarily "love" Roxy. He wants the benefit of providing kits for the gang. He appreciates Roxy's presence and respects her, and the feeling is mutual for Roxy. What they have is more of a partnership than a relationship. Bone Shred often orders his cats to bring food to Roxy and Shredded Ivy before anyone else.

Though Bone Shred's new name has spread through twolegplace and made cats wary of him, his burn scars are still enough to make the toughest cats scoff at him. He tries to cover his face with leaves or newspaper, but it won't stay on and it just makes him look ridiculous. Poisoned Sap tries to convince him there's nothing wrong with his scars, but Bone Shred is frustrated and snarls "They make me weak! And we need to root out all weaknesses to focus on power and survival."

While hunting in a patch of woodland just outside twolegplace, Bone Shred discovers the remains of a fox. He takes the skull and puts it on his head. The sight of it unsettles Poisoned Sap and the others with them, and some cat voices this. Bone Shred says "Good. This will work perfectly then." And he wears the skull from that moment on.

[image]

Becoming a Spy

Remembering Poisoned Sap's past friendship with Boone, Bone Shred gives her a task: Seduce and earn Boone's trust, become accepted into Draco's Gang, and spy for him. He wants Poisoned Sap to learn everything she can about their enemies home and

routine, so that he can launch one big final attack to drive them out of the city for good, and kill any cat who remains.

Poisoned Sap is surprised. She believes Draco's cats killed Whiskey and agrees that they must pay, but doesn't think Boone is involved. And she doesn't want to use him like this, still holding on to their past connection. Bone Shred scoffs that toms are dumb and easy to manipulate when it comes to she-cats. She wonders if this is really true. Bone Shred continues pressing her until she reluctantly agrees to the plan.

Poisoned Sap goes to Draco's ally and is immediately greeted with hostility, as Bone Shred's Gang has done nothing but attack them since Whiskey's death. She acts cool and polite, explaining that she wishes to join the gang due to her friendship with Boone. Boone, having not seen Poisoned Sap in moons, is surprised by this, but still views her as a friend and supports the idea. Draco agrees to let her join them, but he'll be keeping an eye on her. She uses her old name, Sappy, not wanting to seem more intimidating and suspicious.

She begins studying the alleyways, dead-ends, and daily routines of Draco's Gang. All the while, she's rekindling her bond with Boone, and if anything they've grown even closer. She falls deeper in love with him and sees how much he trusts her, though she questions if this is because of who she is as an individual, or because she's a she-cat and toms are swayed by them, just like Bone Shred said.

[image]

One night, when she's certain no cat is around, Poisoned Sap relays information to Bone Shred. She feels some guilt about it, wishing she could just stay in Draco's Gang and forget her mission.

Blade, one of Draco's cats, catches this meeting. Bone Shred immediately lunges and pins the cat before he can yowl an alarm, ordering Poisoned Sap to kill him. She is startled, angry, and panicking at being caught, but she doesn't want to go as far as to kill a cat. She starts to protest, but Bone Shred snaps "Use your head! Whiskey taught us to do what's necessary for survival, and THIS is necessary. Silence him."

Knowing Bone Shred is right, that the entire mission will have failed, Poisoned Sap slashes Blade's throat. She's surprised at the rush of adrenaline she gets from this and stares at her bloody claws for a moment. Had she really just taken the life out of a cat? It never struck her that she possessed such a power. Bone Shred praises her and tells her to wash her paws, while he goes to hide the body, tossing it in the sewer.

The Coming Battle

Bone Shred has begun developing his plan of attack, but knows he needs greater numbers. He begins gathering starving helpless cats off the streets, promising them shelter, protection, and food in exchange for absolute loyalty. He's planning his attack on Draco's Gang, though the newcomers are unaware of how far they are expected to go in battle.

Among these recruits are Howl, Dandelion, Rocky, Sun, Oil, and Ice. The latter three like Bone Shred's naming convention and take on new names: Blinding Sun, Oil Tail, and Crimson Ice.

Back in Draco's Gang, Poisoned Sap is closer than ever with Boone. They have become mates, and she is now pregnant with his kits. She knows she should be happy, but feels sick to her stomach. She knows the truth will soon come out about her being a spy, and she will lose Boone for good. She also worries about what Bone Shred will think of her expecting.

[image]

One night, she meets with Bone Shred and tells him she's having kits, expecting him to be angry. But to her surprise, Bone Shred is glad and praises her for being so convincing to Draco's cats. Now that she's a queen, no cat will think she'd betray them, and he compliments her for the idea. Poisoned Sap is offended as she wonders if Bone Shred thinks her relationship with Boone is solely for the mission.

She objects that she does love Boone and he feels the same. Bone Shred snorts and says "There is no love in this world, Poisoned Sap. Only cats using each other to get what they want. The sooner you

understand that, the better."

Poisoned Sap reflects on his words as he leaves.

Kits

About two moons later, Poisoned Sap gives birth to three kits: A black and dark gray tom, a ginger tom, and a ginger she-cat. Boone is overjoyed, but Poisoned Sap's happiness is dampened by her mission and the doubt Bone Shred has put in her mind about Boone. She doesn't even know if she wants these kits. It all feels like a mistake.

Boone wants to name the kits, but Poisoned Sap keeps putting it off as she figures out what to do going forward. Should she stay here with Boone? Or go back to her brother? Does Boone really love her, or does he just want the kits? Sometimes when she looks at Boone, for a moment he's like a stranger, as she wonders how well she really knows him. Is he just using her, like Bone Shred thinks?

[image]

Part 5

Battle

Several days later, at dawn, Bone Shred launches a vicious attack on Draco's Gang, killing every cat in his path. Poisoned Sap leaves her kits in the care of Widow, a queen in Draco's Gang, while she races into action. For a moment she's unsure of what to do, but when Bone Shred commands her to fight, she pushes away her reservations and begins turning on Draco's cats.

Boone is shocked to discover Poisoned Sap has been spying all along. She insists what they have is real and she loves him, but she has to complete her mission and avenge her leader. Not wanting to fight him, she tells him to stay out of this. In initial anger at her betrayal, Boone attacks her and slashes her cheek, much to her shock. But ultimately he gives in to his emotions and lets her go.

As the fight rages on, Poisoned Sap corners Draco and prepares to deal the killing blow, thinking of Whiskey and how she will avenge him. Boone suddenly jumps in the way, begging her not to do this, as this isn't the cat she is. He tells her to think of their kits. Poisoned Sap is hurt seeing him so upset and gives in. Draco slips away and re-enters the battle, killing Roxy moments later.

[image]

A Lesson Learned

Bone Shred is stunned by the death of his mate, Roxy, and Draco's Gang declares victory. For a long while, Bone Shred is quiet and emotionless, crouched over their surviving kit, Shredded Ivy. He then turns on Poisoned Sap furiously. He snarls that it's her fault Roxy died and they lost the battle, as she was too focused on her feelings for Boone rather than power and her mission.

He hisses "Boone has manipulated and weakened you! That's what toms do to she-cats they say they love. I told you, everyone is just

trying to get what they want! And now, because of his trick during the battle, we've lost, and Roxy is dead."

He yells at her for a while and Poisoned Sap realizes he's right as she feels the sting of the scratches Boone left on her cheek in battle. She believes Bone Shred now, that Boone has been manipulating her, and it resulted in Roxy's death. She should have focused on seducing him while remaining emotionless. She's frustrated with herself for falling for his lies and fake affection.

[image]

Bone Shred is set on killing Boone to avenge Roxy and orders Poisoned Sap to help by luring him into a trap. She is feeling a numbness from shock, but she's also angry. She coldly agrees to help kill Boone.

Poisoned Sap's Choice

That night, Poisoned Sap cautiously enters Draco's alleyways. Despite her betrayal, she thinks the cats might be less hostile due to her being the mother of kits in their care. For the first time, she thinks of her kits, but isn't really concerned about them. She hardly even wants to take ownership of them. They would just remind her of Boone's deceit.

Lucky for her, Boone is the one to come across her. He growls "I thought I scented you" as he steps out from the shadows to meet her. He is cold, but visibly more hurt than angry. The first thing he does is tell her that their kits are being cared for by Widow, one of the queens.

Things are quiet and awkward between them for a moment. Then Boone asks "Why..? Was anything we had real?" Poisoned Sap is privately amused at how convincing he sounds, believing now that anything involving their relationship was an act. But she can act too. She purrs "Of course, I love you. But your gang killed Whiskey. We had to try to avenge him". Boone lashes his tail in annoyance, muttering that they never killed Whiskey. Is there a single honest word that comes out of your mouth?, Poisoned Sap thinks to herself.

Boone goes on to say she should talk to Draco. He might be willing to forgive her and let her continue living with him and the kits. Poisoned Sap hesitates, knowing she must get Boone to leave the alley with her, to where Bone Shred is waiting.

She gently suggests they go for a walk, away from Draco's alley where they might be caught and interrupted. Boone agrees, and they walk side by side toward the end of the alley. Poisoned Sap begins feeling sick to her stomach as she eyes him, thinking of how much she loved and trusted this cat, but in the end, Bone Shred was right.

As they near the end of the ally, the feeling in her stomach hardens into anger. They round the corner, and Bone Shred leaps from the shadows, pinning Boone, who is completely caught off guard.

"You thought you could get away with manipulating my sister, did you?" Bone Shred sneers in his ear. Boone is in utter shock and asks what he's talking about. Poisoned Sap swipes her claws across his face and snarls "Stop playing games! I know exactly what you've been up to."

Bone Shred says "There's something I haven't told you, because I knew it would be hard for you. But I think you're strong enough to handle it now." Poisoned Sap questions him. He goes on "This fleabag reeks of lies. Boone is the cat who killed Whiskey."

Boone exclaims "What?" While Poisoned Sap is frozen in shock, her fur prickling with anger. She curses at him, and Bone Shred hisses "He killed Whiskey, used your feelings to his advantage, and wanted your kits just to look good for his gang."

Boone now realizes what is happening here. He snarls at Bone Shred to shut up and desperately pleads with Poisoned Sap to listen to him. "He's the one manipulating you! Don't you see? He's made all this up to have power over you!"

Bone Shred digs his claws into Boone's shoulders and hisses "More lies! Kill him, Poisoned Sap."

"Think of the life we'll have together, with the kits!" Boone begs.

"Don't take the wrong path."

Bone Shred snarls "Who are you going to believe? This piece of dung or your own brother?"

[image]

Poisoned Sap is torn for a moment, Boone's words tugging on what remains of her heart. But she also loves and trusts Bone Shred, her best friend and brother, with her life. She believes he would never manipulate her. She chooses Bone Shred and dismisses Boone's words as more lies and deceit.

She slashes Boone's throat, and he lies dead in a pool of blood.

Poisoned Sap steps back. She expects some sense of heartache and remorse, but instead she finds it the most thrilling kill she's ever done. She thinks he deserved to die, and she is now free from his tricks.

Bone Shred praises her. He comments "You're growing stronger. No tom will ever trick you again. But now you know their weaknesses. Use it to your advantage."

The Final Battle

The next day, Bone Shred launches an attack on Draco's camp. Draco's cats are completely unprepared for another attack so soon, many cats from both sides still injured, but Bone Shred is angry and has many new recruits from around twolegplace on his side.

Poisoned Sap thrives in this battle, still feeling a high from killing Boone. She fights viciously and mercilessly, killing multiple cats: Puddle, Bell, and Boone's brother, Clay. Bone Shred kills Slang and Ace.

During the fight, Poisoned Sap spots her kits in the nursery, still very tiny and watching in terror as Widow protects them. For a heartbeat, she thinks of taking her kits. She doesn't care for being a mother, but thinking strategically, knows the kits would grow to benefit Bone Shred's Gang. She could raise them to be strong and vicious.

She races for the nursery, but Draco canons into her. He snarls at her to stay away from the kits, that they belong to his gang now. Poisoned Sap attacks him, and the battle goes on until Draco and his cats realize there's no way for them to win this, especially when Bone Shred has recruited so many cats.

Bone Shred orders Draco to leave their home, or every one of them will be killed. Draco angrily submits, calling on his cats to retreat. As they leave, Bone Shred's cats sneer at them and taunt them, even though elders and queens are among them, wounded and now homeless.

[image]

Poisoned Sap sees Widow and a couple other cats carrying her kits away with them. But she decides not to go after them, thinking to herself "If they have Boone's blood, they'll be weak and useless anyway".

Epilogue

Bone Shred takes over Draco's alleys, and Poisoned Sap grows colder than ever. She's seen the world for what it is and will keep in mind what she's learned about toms, manipulation, and weaknesses. She will continue standing by her brother as he leads the gang to further greatness.

Draco's Gang retreats to a neighboring town, wanting to be nowhere near Bone Shred's Gang. As they enter new alleyways, Draco declares that from this point on, they will not attempt peace with any new groups they encounter. If they had not formed a friendship with Whiskey, none of this would have happened. They will only look after themselves.

Thinking of how Bone Shred used the fox skull to intimidate others, Draco comes across some dog teeth in an alleyway. He sticks them in his collar and turns to his cats, declaring that from this moment on, they will be known as BloodClan. And they will become the toughest cats in the city.

[image]

End Notes

Widow raises Poisoned Sap's kits to be fierce and loyal BloodClan cats. She names them Smoky, Sniper, and Ginger. These cats were actually created back in 2012 as part of a BloodClan story I wrote! It might get a rewrite or fresh summary someday. Smoky grows up to be cold and tough, and very similar to his mother, he uses a she-cat named Swirl to have two kits born to serve BloodClan: Twizler and Streetlight.

Oh, and one more thing. Bone Shred is the one who killed Whiskey. He grew increasingly frustrated about Whiskey's alliance with Draco and felt combining their gangs was a ridiculous idea and a mistake that would lead to Draco taking over completely. He killed Whiskey that night after the celebration and pinned the blame on Draco's Gang to ensure the gangs stayed rivals, and to get rid of Draco once and for all. He knew he would have the support of the rest of the gang in avenging Whiskey, a beloved and respected leader. Only Bone Shred has ever known the truth, and it's a secret he took to the grave.

If Poisoned Sap had fallen in love with a cat in Whiskey's Gang, Bone Shred wouldn't have cared. It was the fact that it was a cat in Draco's Gang that made Bone Shred disapprove. Poisoned Sap had always been there for him, and as he rose to leader, he wanted to make sure she continued being loyal to him. Believe it or not, a tiny part of Bone Shred found comfort in Poisoned Sap's presence, as they'd been together since kithood. He was going to do whatever it took to keep her at his side, even if it meant convincing her that all toms were manipulative and to stop seeking romance. If she had decided to join Draco's Gang to be with Boone, he would have lost her forever.

[image]

[image]

[image]